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## Government Indian Office Disapproves of Indian Congress Sodalities Begin Decline: Part II Continued from December

Mark G. Thiel

*Marquette University*, [mark.thiel@marquette.edu](mailto:mark.thiel@marquette.edu)

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by Mark Thiel

Among the activities 224 persons, mostly adults, were confirmed. A new chapel was consecrated and deliberations on the site for the next congress were held. The congress concluded with the great farewell handshake. Everyone got in a circle and shook hands with each other.

Among requests that surfaced at the congress were growing and persistent demands for more priests, churches and schools for the reservation communities.

In 1892, after voting on the site for the next congress, one delegate posed a comment. "The women folks had not given their vote. They would feel slighted if they had not to say anything."

To this question Marty intervened with the rebuke, "In the church it was held so from the beginning that the woman had to keep silent in public affairs. Man has been appointed by God as head, to order and arrange. The woman's honor and privilege is to govern the house and to raise and educate men."

The next several congresses continued to be substantial gatherings. Marty proposed making four local gatherings and the bishop would visit each once every four years. The Indians said they wanted annual access to the bishop for baptism and confirmation as well as they desired the mutual support found in the general Sioux gatherings.

By 1895 Marty was bishop of the St. Cloud Diocese in Minnesota. He had an agreement with his successor, Bishop Thomas O'Gorman, by which he retained the Sioux Apostolate. Contrary to the Sioux, Marty believed that the inspiration derived from large Catholic gatherings were no longer needed.

The aforementioned Jesuit and Benedictine mission schools were threatened with losing vital federal funding. Marty suggested that the sodalists petition the U. S. Congress for use of their federal trust money to be used for mission schools. If the schools closed many feared their children would be forced to attend off-reservation government boarding schools.

Federal aid ceased in June of 1900. The Indian Rights Association convinced the U. S. Congress to cut appropriations to contract schools that were mostly operated by Catholic religious orders. The Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions initiated a fund-raising effort and explored other means to replace the lost financial support. It was believed essential to keep the needs of the Catholic missions before the eastern Catholic public.

In 1904, President Roosevelt had directed the use of treaty trust funds for mission schools formerly receiving federal funding contracts. The new contracts, just implemented during the fall term, utilized money derived from the trust fund interest, not the principal.

A Presbyterian Sioux-language newspaper charged the Catholic Church with theft of trust monies as the Roosevelt administration had unilaterally altered funding procedures so that contract awards were paid out in common from the trust fund and not from the prorated shares of mission school supporters. The Catholics retorted that the Protestants were spreading lies to which they were no longer willing to listen.

The issue was taken before the U. S. Supreme Court. The court rendered its decision favoring the

Catholic Sioux position.

The 1897 general congress was very different from past annual gatherings. It was ripe with dissension and dissatisfaction. The bishop failed to attend due to illness. Congress participants overwhelmingly supported the mission schools, and narrowly resolved to retain the general congresses of the past. In an unprecedented move, a delegate group that dissented on the latter resolution departed and held its own congress two months later on Standing Rock Reservation.

Congress cohesiveness was clearly left wanting without Marty's counsel. Successor bishops did not reign over all the former Dakota Territory from Marty's see in Sioux Falls. Additional dioceses came to be created with sees in Fargo, Jamestown, and Lead. Regional congresses began to appear intermittently. In 1898, two congresses were held in South Dakota and from 1900-1910, a congress was held in both North and South Dakota during four summers. The gathering size remained large, with 2000-4000 participants each.

The principal concern of the 1903-1904 congresses was divorce. Several Sioux couples had recently divorced in spite of Church teaching to the contrary. Beginning in 1905, thrift, church support and temperance received attention for the next several years.

Bishop John Stariha admonished the sodalists to spend their money prudently and support the church according to their means. Despite their poverty, the sodalists responded by resolving to aid the bishop for the support of more churches and catechists.

Stariha initiated a movement of total abstinence from alcohol, administering the pledge to 60 prominent sodalists. The Sioux were not seen as greatly addicted to drink. The bishop concluded that this was a prudent precaution now that people were regularly exposed to saloons in new towns bordering their reservations.

In 1905, the government Indian Office withdrew approval of future alternative Independence Day celebrations. To promote attendance and patriotism at the reservation agency celebration while simultaneously discouraging traditional customs was the purpose of the policy.

With patriotism and the adoption of American ways, a new spirit of indifference developed among the young generation. The permissive 'Protestant' and secular atmosphere prevalent in the new off-reservation towns and elsewhere was waging great havoc with imparting Catholic morality.

The Catholic missionaries disliked government Indian boarding schools, saloons, and the 'Indian dance' routines at rural fairs, urban amusement parks, and traveling circuses, shows, and rodeos. They complained that drinking and divorce were increasing and that attention paid to preaching was decreasing.

Stariha pressed for expansion of his diocese's corps of catechists. He knew that the people had instant confidence in their own qualified Christian leaders. Catechists frequently doubled as sodality leaders and proved to be of inestimable value as assistants to the priests.

In 1908, increased evangelization efforts were conducted on some Sioux reservations where religious



Standing Soldier, president of the St. Joseph Society, Standing Rock Reservation, Ft. Yates, N.D. Host of the 1910 South Dakota Sioux Congress. (Photo courtesy of Mark Thiel, Maquette University Archives).

fervor had declined. On Pine Ridge evangelization reaped spectacular successes. More catechists were active and more sodalities, chapels, and sodality meeting houses were established.

By 1910, Catholicism had clearly taken hold among the Sioux. Nearly half of the 25,000 Sioux in North and South Dakota were now Catholics. The jubilation was short-lived. Church interest was declining among the younger generation.

Sodalities provided innovative Sioux lay leaders and missionaries with an opportunity to collaborate in rebuilding a meaningful new Native society after the demise of the old.

Missionaries insisted that Christian spirituality totally replace Sioux spirituality. In exchange the people gained new opportunities for leadership, mutual aid, and self-esteem.

Sodality membership declined among the second generation Sioux Catholics. The lives of these young adults were more attuned to American language and life and less to Sioux tradition. Missionaries and catechists responded by redoubling their efforts among this generation. Some successes were achieved. This is attested to by the continuance of the Catholic Sioux Congresses today.



South Dakota Catholic Sioux Congress, catechists and sodalists pictured. Date and place unknown. (Photo courtesy of Mark Thiel, Maquette University Archives).

**Deacon Ben Black Bear, Jr., director of Native Affairs for the Diocese of Rapid City, has been appointed to the state reconciliation commission. More on this story in the February West River Catholic.**